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ABSTRACT

Academic advising by faculty members has often been ineffective. Peer advising systems that employ peers as academic counselors may successfully address student criticism of faculty advising systems. Peer systems capitalize on the primacy of peer influence, provide an economical delivery system, and are available and accessible to students. These programs are strongly identified with students, able to improve the organizational dynamics of the advising program, and offer positive personal benefits to students involved in the advising program. Although student-to-student counseling has been effective in a variety of student personnel functions, questions concerning continuity, objectivity, and accountability must be answered effectively during program development. Critical elements for program success are: (1) formulation of meaningful peer counseling goals; (2) development of informed peer counseling support; (3) delineation of realistic peer counseling activities; (4) careful selection and training of peer counseling personnel; and (5) evaluation and revision of peer counseling efforts. If these requisites are met and the program is appropriate to the educational institution and its students, then the peer counseling program will be effective. (Author/NRB)

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The Use of Peers as College Academic Advisors: Reasons and Evidence

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Introduction

Student personnel work, of which counseling is an important segment, is designed to serve students both directly and indirectly; directly by analyzing student needs and developing programs to satisfy them; indirectly through improving the morale of the college and thereby making the institution a more effective instrument of social progress (Wrenn, 1951). Student personnel services key upon the individual student. According to Wrenn, this raises the college's level of effectiveness by increasing the maturity and competence of each student. Counseling, both of a personal and academic nature, fosters the discovery and development of individual potential. This occurs on a micro level, a student as a member of the college community, and on a macro level, a student as a member of society.

Most psychologists would agree that students have a number of basic needs, a need being a conscious or unconscious demand of an organism. Wrenn (1951) lists six major student needs.

> 1) The need to become increasingly independent of parents and other adults; 2) The need to establish satisfying intellectual, social, and emotional relations with the opposite sex; 3) The need for status in his/her own age group, acceptance by both sexes; 4) The need for sense of security: emotional security in having someone love and believe in him/her, economic security in the present with promise for the future, social security in a sense of belonging to an accepted social unit, such as the family or other primary social group; 5) The need for success and a feeling of growth or achievement in at least one area of his/her life; and 6) The need for acceptable goals for the future, both vocational and life purpose goals. (p. 8)

Collegiate instruction serves as a beacon, lighting the way for a student to discover how to meet his/her physical, social, and emotional needs, but

academic instruction is not capable of helping students to achieve their needs in and of itself. Student personnel services, especially counseling, complement the instructional program of the college or complete the whole rather than merely supplementing it.[1/] Counseling aids students in satisfying needs unmet by the instructional function of the college environment. Like instruction, counseling is directed toward the optimum development of student capabilities. The maturation of an individual student is a multifaceted process. The student requires good teaching and good counseling in order to grow intellectually and emotionally. The result of a program designed to meet those basic needs is a complete individual, a person who is a functioning and productive member of society.

Academic advising is designed to provide authoritative information about the educational program so that students can make informed, accurate decisions. An understanding of the rationale behind college requirements should facilitate acceptance of those requirements as well as to promote the idea of intellectual inquiry. Students should be encouraged to take advantage of the breadth of educational opportunity existing on campus. This should reduce underachievement and "intellectual malingering." The emphasis of academic advising should be in helping a student to clarify issues, to gain perspective upon his/her strengths and weaknesses, to get the facts straight, and to work out alternative courses of action. It should not hand the student ready-made answers. The long-range view of personal student growth should be the prime concern of academic advising (Robertson, 1958).

Undergraduate student academic advising has traditionally been the task of individual faculty members (Hardee, 1959; 1970). Peer advising can be an alternative to faculty advising. Zunker (1975) reports that the use of students as paraprofessional academic advisors is growing as the use of peer advisors expanded from 8.5% in 1964 to 29% in 1974 at surveyed institutions.[2] This increase is the result of a reordering of faculty and counseling priorities. Traditionally, the faculty advisor serves as a student's primary source of information in designing a program of study which meets college graduation requirements. Faculty advisors often find that they are responsible for a large number of students and that many of the advising tasks they must perform are necessary but mundane (Robertson, 1958). Faculty advisors with extensive research and/or teaching interests are reluctant to spend time with students who want help filling out forms. This disinterest on the part of many faculty members affects the quality of the advisor/advisee relationship.

Despite frequent student utilization, few students find academic advising services to be useful and, in a national survey, 45% of the students felt that academic advising was of little value (Carney and Barak, 1976). Frequent student criticisms of the faculty advising system are: unavailability of advisors, lack of interest in students, lack of knowledge about the requirements and about referral sources, and advisors "too busy" to spend any time with them (Gnepp, Masters, and Keating, 1980).[3] Hence, peer academic advisement programs have been formulated and implemented in order to rectify serious student dissatisfaction with faculty advisors and the academic advising system in general (Leventhal, Berman, McCarthy, and Wasserman, 1976). A system of peer academic advising, in which undergraduates take

on the more routine advising responsibilities ordinarily undertaken by faculty members, addresses most of the problems students find with "traditional" advising programs.[4/]

On most college campuses there are actually two academic advising systems. One is formal, structured, and responsible to the academic program of the college, while the other system is both informal and unstructured. The latter advisement system is carried on between students and operates whenever one student helps another student make judgments and decisions regarding college-related problems of an academic, social, or personal nature. A peer advisement system, by selecting and training qualified students, logically co-opts this informal source of information. If the peer advising program is effective, the validity of the information dispensed by peer advisors is much more accurate than the informal student advisement network. Using capable upperclassmen to advise students in their majors on matters dealing with academic problems, class scheduling, program planning and changing, and registration brings more personnel into the advisement system. Faculty time can then be diverted from the programming function to educational and research duties. However, faculty advisors can and should still play an important role in the advisement program, offering advice on graduate school, careers, etc.

Peer advisors are, in fact, uniquely qualified to help other students face, solve, and cope with the academic and social problems associated with the adjustment to a new learning environment. Students are more willing to accept advice and direction from a peer advisor who has, at one time or another in his/her college career, experienced similar emotions and problems (Creaser and Carseilo, 1979; Prior, 1964). Also, students tend to feel more

at ease in the presence of a counselor who is a fellow student. Peer advisors emphasize and empathize with the student experience as fellow students and this can be the key to successful advisor/advisee relationships. Peer advising is productive because the advice and guidance received by the advisee is given both on a level that advisees can identify and feel comfortable with, and in a professional manner as peer advisors are trained in counseling techniques.

Like all counseling programs, the goal of peer academic advisement is to increase the probability that a student can surmount obstacles barring a smooth transition from high school to college. The objectives of a counseling program are to promote student retention and student development. However, many intellectually capable students are unable to make that crucial transition from high school to college successfully. Aschenbrenner (1963) points out glitches that must be overcome by new students in their adjustment period:

> (1) Students must adjust from the compulsory attendance environment that exists in high school to the voluntary attendance environment in college; 2) Students fail to realize that to earn A and B grades in college it is necessary to alter study habits and attitudes successful in high school; 3) Many students begin college majoring in a discipline inappropriate to their abilities; and 4) Students are overcome by the maze of academic regulations confronting them in college. Often, this is the first time they are expected to be responsible for their own academic planning. (p. 185)

For the freshman, there are new academic routines to learn, new study procedures to master, new academic and social values to explore--in short, new students must adjust to a new environment. The goal of the peer academic advising program is to aid new students in this transition (Brown, 1965; 1977).

Yet, advisement should not cease at the close of a student's freshman year. For sophomores and upperclassmen, peer advisors can and should aid

students in developing their own intellectual maturity. As Seveyega (1976) writes:

> The peer advisor helps the student to identify personal goals, to examine the necessary components in the achievement of those goals, and to design a program for the acquisition of those components that are lacking. Thus, the student can begin to realistically focus on his needs. The individualized program includes evaluation and utilization of personal assets, available support programs, and other possible resources. (p. 2)

Counseling encourages a student to operate at his/her optimum levels of ability by helping the student to make a realistic inventory of his/her strengths and weaknesses. Peer academic advisement is proficient in helping students to achieve these types of academic and personal objectives because the advisor/advisee relationship is one built around student-to-student empathetic bonds.

It must be noted that peer advisors are not expected to counsel students in depth. Peer advisors should be able to recognize certain signposts and danger signals which indicate personal adjustment problems. Warning signs include poor study and reading habits, sudden drops in academic achievement, erratic class attendance, lack of interest in school work, over or under participation in co-curricular activities, social conflict, and fluctuation in emotional stability (Aschenbrenner, 1963). Peer advisors should be sensitive beyond their role as academic advisors, but they should not act beyond this role. They are, however, able to accept the role of referring students to the agency on campus best qualified to help them.

Advantages of Using Peers as Academic Advisors

There are a number of articles concerning the use of peer advisors in the field of academic advisement. A review of these works points out a number of advantages evident in the implementation of undergraduate

paraprofessional advising programs.

1. Peer counseling recognizes and capitalizes upon the primacy of peer influence in interpersonal interaction and development (Glassboro State College, 1978). Students feel peers are more capable of giving realistic advice than are professional or faculty advisors because students share common collegiate experiences. Therefore, peer advisors are able to share their knowledge and experience with advisees in an effective way. Also, peer advisors are much more approachable than faculty or professional advisors because of the similarity of age among peers.

2. Paraprofessional academic advisement programs are an economical means for delivering services (Allen, 1974; Brown, 1965; Habley, 1979). A successful peer advising program costs less to implement and administer than an advising program of comparable quality using either professional or faculty advisors. In times of economic adversity, a period in which the University of Michigan is in the midst of today, peer advising can be a cost-effective and successful method of serving students in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. Academic advisement can truly be "smaller but better" with a greater emphasis on peer-based advising services.

3. Peer advisors are more available and accessible in both formal and informal venues than are faculty advisors. This increased availability has a number of positive effects upon the advisement program (Habley, 1979). First, is an increase in the use of student advising services. Advisement questions can be solved on-the-spot if advisors are "in the field" or referred to the advisement office for more in-depth counseling. Referrals to the advisement office will increase because peer advisors, as students, are

"in the field" more than faculty advisors and, "in the field," peer advisors come into contact with many students needing academic advisement. Referrals to the advising unit will occur on a regular basis and students will be more willing to enter the advising environment when they sense that other students are comfortable in that environment. Second, peer advisors offer the flexibility advising services need during peak-time activities associated with orientation and registration (Shaw, 1981). Third, peer advising releases staff time to be used more effectively elsewhere. A professional counselor can spend time with students having particular or severe individual problems (Baldwin, 1976). A faculty advisor can spend more time related to teaching and/or research activities.

4. Peer advisors are able to bring relevant input into the advising system (Habley, 1979). Peer advisors, as students, are aware of the problems encountered by other students; therefore, as counselors, peer advisors can bring systemtic input into the decision-making processes of the advising program, input that reflects the student point of view. This is truly significant. Student service programs cannot effectively aid students if they lack student input into program development. Without such input, these programs are directed towards perceived student needs and it is probable that such programs are irrelevant and ineffectual (Gill and Vruehling, 1979). Peer academic advisement programs are able to target their services to the student population in an effective manner because the advisors are aware of the needs of the service group.

5. Peer advisors improve the organizational dynamics of the advisement operation. Peer advisors are enthusiastic and their enthusiasm is contagious (Habley, 1979). Peer advisors challenge both the professional and the

faculty advisor to perform at optimum levels. Constant turnover of paraprofessional personnel infuses the academic advisement operation with "new blood" each year. Peer advisors provide other advising staff with a stimulus to improve and to change. In addition, peer advisors foster the development of an open and dynamic advising system, a system challenged to deliver efficient and effective services.

6. Finally, a peer advising program has positive effects upon the advisors as individuals. First, the opportunity to become a peer advisor enables students to help themselves as well as others. Peer advisors should become self-reliant and self-sufficient (Martin and Carkhuff, 1968; Pyle and Snyder, 1971; West and Ray, 1977). Second, peer advisement can be a source of student employment (Conroy, 1978; Parker, 1976). With the increasing cost of a college education, colleges are pressed to offer job opportunities to students who must work to make ends meet. Peer advising programs are a method for colleges to provide jobs to students. Third, a paraprofessional advising program provides students with the chance to try "experiential" learning (Habley, 1979). Exposure to training in interpersonal skills and constant interaction with other students provide peer advisors with viable learning and work experiences while in college.

The Effectiveness of Peer Advising

According to a number of studies, peer advising is effective in aiding students in their adjustment to college and in the achievement of academic and personal growth objectives.

Southwest Texas State University

William F. Brown, a pioneer in the field of student-to-student counseling,

has performed a number of surveys testing the effectiveness of peer academic advising. Brown (1965) describes the advising and orientation program in operation at STSU. This program served as the basis for the evaluation of paraprofessional effectiveness at STSU. Zunker and Brown (1966) compared the effectiveness of peer advisors versus professional advisors. In Brown, Wehe, Zunker, and Haslam (1971), the effectiveness of peer counseling upon the academic adjustment of potential college dropouts is studied. In both tests, the students were selected at random. Each test employed an experimental and a control group. Students counseled by peer advisors were matched as closely as possible to professionally counseled students on the basis of the following variables: sex, age, scholastic ability, study orientation (see Gadzella, 1978), and high school quarter rank.

The studies found that:

a. Professional and student counselors did not differ significantly in their ability to communicate information about effective study procedures.

b. Student counseled freshmen evaluated the counseling program significantly higher than did professionally counseled freshmen. In the second study, student-to-student counseling was also evaluated quite positively.

c. In the first study, female peer advised freshmen made significantly better use of study skills knowledge acquired during counseling while there was no significant difference in the use of this knowledge by male advisees between either peer counseled or professionally counseled new students. In the second study, potential dropouts receiving additional peer counseling on study skills showed significant positive changes in their measured study orientation and study knowledge skills as compared to potential dropouts not receiving additional counseling.

d. Student counseled freshmen retained significantly more of the information communicated about topics other than effective study procedures.

e. Combining male and female advisees, a significant improvement in grade-point average and semester hours earned is obtained in favor of student-to-student counseling. Also, potential dropouts receiving additional peer advisement on study skills had significantly higher grade-point averages than did potential dropouts who had not received additional student-to-student advising.

In conclusion, Zunker and Brown (1966) found that 1) peer advisors were at least as effective as professional counselors on all criteria of counseling productivity tested in this study. In fact, they found that in the majority of tested variables, peer advisors were more effective than professionals; 2) student paraprofessionals were received more positively by advisees than were professional advisors; and 3) freshmen counseled by peer advisors made greater use of the information received during counseling as reflected by earned grades and residual study problems. Brown et al (1971) determined that potential dropouts receiving additional peer instruction in study skills performed at greater levels of academic achievement as reflected by grade-point average than did potential dropouts who did not receive additional help.

Kansas State University and Idaho State University

Two studies comparing the effectiveness of student-to-student advising in comparison to faculty advising are C. Brown and Myers (1975) and Murry (1972).[5/] Their results follow:

a. Neither study found any difference in grade-point average or semester hours completed between peer advised or faculty advised freshmen. This result counters the findings of Brown. However, this difference is explainable and results from differences in the content of the advising

programs among the three schools. In the Southwest Texas State University orientation program, students are exposed to materials designed to aid in their development of study skills. Brown (1965) discusses the use of the Effective Study Test, the Effective Study Guide, and the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes in the STSU program. Neither Kansas State or Idaho State utilize similar materials. Most likely, this accounts for different results obtained by C. Brown and Myers (1975) and Murry (1972) as compared to Zunker and Brown (1966) and Brown et al (1971).

b. Although C. Brown and Myers did not find significant grade-point differences, they did discover a lowered student attrition rate in favor of student advised freshmen. This finding supplements Brown.

c. Replicating results of studies at STSU; C. Brown and Myers, and Murry, found that student advisors were responded to more favorably than were faculty advisors. Also, the level of advisee satisfaction favored peer advised freshmen rather than faculty advised freshmen.

d. Student advisors spent significantly more time in advising contacts than did faculty advisors. Willingness to spend time with advisees could be the reason for the high levels of advisee satisfaction exhibited by peer advised students.

C. Brown and Myers concluded from their study that 1) student advised freshmen felt that their advisors were more interested in helping them and in increasing their understanding of curriculum matters. Additionally, student advised freshmen felt that their advisors were more likely to provide relevant information about registration; 2) student advised freshmen had more positive attitudes toward the advising system; and 3) student advisors were perceived as treating the advising situation as one entailing a joint decision, in contrast to faculty advisors who were seen as either

more likely to make the curriculum decisions for the student or likely to leave the decision totally up to the students. Murry made similar conclusions.

Both C. Brown and Myers (1975) and Murry (1972) state that peer academic advisement programs are effective in providing counseling to new students. Peer academic advising programs are helpful in aiding new students in their transition to college. Murry writes that:

> The overall results of the study suggest that the level of competence needed for the advising function is not beyond the capacity of most upper-division students. Given the minimal training and supervision provided to this largely unselected group of seniors, advising outcomes appear to be at least equal, and frequently superior, to those for faculty advisors. (p. 566)

As did Brown (Brown 1965; 1977; Brown, Wehe, Zunker, and Haslam, 1971; Zunker and Brown, 1966), both studies give credence and support to the use of trained peers as college academic advisors.

The University of Michigan

A number of peer advisement programs exist on the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan.[6/] Two of these programs, the Students' Counseling Office, a student-directed and student-staffed operation in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and the Peer Advisor Program in the School of Nursing, provide academic advisement. Other programs provide other types of peer-based student services. The Office of Financial Aid provides peer financial aid counseling and Counseling Services provides peer personal counseling through 76-GUIDE.

None of these programs have undertaken a serious evaluation of their services. 76-GUIDE, perhaps the oldest and best known of all campus peer advising programs, provides most of its services over the telephone to unidentified clients. Hence, they find it difficult to evaluate their

services. In the past, the Students' Counseling Office has not considered evaluation an important objective. (This year SCO would like to initiate some service evaluation within its level of expertise and financial resources.) The School of Nursing program is too small and the Financial Aid program is too new to warrant comprehensive evaluation. Nevertheless, the latter three programs have been informally evaluated.[7/]

Sandra Willis of the School of Nursing (SN) (Willis, 1981) reports that SN peer advisors are involved in a number of activities: sponsoring workshops (Nursing as a Profession, Conference on Human Sexuality, etc.), organizing study groups, and coordinating social events. She believes that peer advisors provide positive benefits to the students they help as well as to the SN counseling program. These benefits include: 1) the fostering of camaraderie among students; 2) the reduction of test anxiety due to the personalized attention new students receive from peer advisors and peer-led study groups; and 3) the retention of potential dropouts. Although the School of Nursing program has not been formally evaluated, observations speak in favor of its continuance.

The Office of Financial Aid peer advising program is 1.5 years old. Preliminary, although unsubstantiated, reports show a number of positive results emanating from the utilization of peer advisors (Borset, 1981). First, traffic at the Financial Aid Office has been reduced due to the increased accessibility of financial aid information provided by peer advisors. Second, peer advisors have aided and increased the dissemination of financial aid information. Third, the overall use of the Office of Financial Aid has increased through the greater accessibility and availability of peer personnel.

According to the various studies above, (Zunker and Brown, 1966; Brown,

Wehe, Zunker, and Haslam, 1971; Murry, 1972; C. Brown and Myers, 1975), it appears that peer academic advisors are as effective, if not superior to, professional or faculty academic advisors in a variety of advising situations. Student-to-student coundeling aids retention, and, depending on the content of the particular advising program, improves new student grade-point average and study skills efficiency (Brown, 1977). The University of Michigan peer advising programs discussed above (Borset, 1981; Willis, 1981) show that peer-based student services are successful on our own campus. The inclusion of the Office of Financial Aid program (although not a program of peer academic advisement) is intended to show the ability of peer advising programs to increase the overall utilization of student service programs in a successful and economical manner.

"Disadvantages" of Peer Academic Advising

As Habley (1979) points out, as with any innovative program, the implementation of a paraprofessional academic advisement system can have some significant disadvantages. However, this statement is not meant to preclude the consideration of such a program, rather, the anticipation of potential problems can assist administrators in planning the most effective advising program possible. Disadvantages can be dealt with effectively through careful attention to selection, training, and supervision. Three of the most evident disadvantages--lack of continuity, lack of objectivity, and problems of accountability--are discussed below.

Perhaps the greatest problem with peer academic advising concerns questions of continuity. Qualified and sensitive paraprofessionals are usually available for no longer than two years. Just at the point when advising skills are the most developed, peer advisors graduate from college, leaving

the advising program at the pinnacle of their ability (Habley, 1979). Therefore, when planning the implementation of a peer academic advising program, students should be chosen on criteria based upon their ability to perform as academic advisors and upon the number of years they are available to the program. In formulating the program, a planned attrition rate of 40% to 60% per year should be assumed and steps should be taken to minimize the difficulties associated with the impact of advisor attrition. However, a large turnover of advisors is beneficial in providing to the program advisors that are enthusiastic and aware of the problems continually faced by students.

In the eyes of faculty, the major criticism of a peer academic advising program is the perceived lack of objectivity exhibited by peer advisors (Habley, 1979). This problem stems from the peer advisor's dual status as a student; the temptation to subjectively advise students away from difficult courses or instructors is present. The solution is a carefully formulated and administered training program. In training, advisors should realize that information should be objectively presented to advisees, and that value judgments concerning the teaching-learning process are inappropriate in the advisement setting. It should be noted that this "perceived lack of objectivity" could be, instead of a general negative aspect inherent in peer academic advising, the ability of peer advisors to suggest appropriate courses to advisees based upon their knowledge of advisee strengths, abilities, and preferences, combined with their personal knowledge of the emphases of individual instructors. Nevertheless, peer advisors should be trained that value judgments are the prerogative of the advisee with the view that the end result of quality academic advisement is sound student

decision-making based upon accurate information disseminated by peer advisors.

With peer academic advisors working for a period of one to three years, accountability can also be a major problem evident in a paraprofessional advising system (Habley, 1979). In most advisement programs, errors surface late in an advisee's college career. By this time, it is likely that the peer advisor responsible for misinforming an advisee has graduated. Yet, preventive steps can be taken to limit the magnitude of accountability problems. A record-keeping system should be established where each advisor/advisee contact is documented with thorough conference notes. These notes should be periodically reviewed by a professional counselor; when errors or possible misconceptions are discovered, the peer advisor can contact the advisee and clarify potential problems. This system of immediate feedback provides to the advising system an accountability mechanism usually unavailable in either professional or faculty advising systems. Such a system minimizes the likelihood that advisor mistakes would result in problems for an unsuspecting advisee.

It is also necessary, when discussing program accountability, to plan for continual evaluation of the success of the paraprofessional advising system in helping students (Bonar, 1976). Evaluations monitoring student satisfaction, administrative satisfaction, and paraprofessional effectiveness should be undertaken in order to properly assess the program. Results should then be made available to all interested parties. Only through demonstrated success do peer advising programs have the assurance of longevity. Studies comparing the costs of peer academic advising with the costs of faculty advising should be conducted in order to determine the actual cost savings in a peer advising program. These tasks are difficult to

accomplish but it is necessary to do so if there is to be serious program accountability within an effective peer advising program.

Further Observations

At most universities there exists a "counseling strain"--large numbers of students and a limited amount of available resources have placed counseling services under severe stress. There is a critical need for expanded freshmen counseling in view of the high level of first-year attrition. After orientation, students are expected to manage for themselves and evidence shows that precollege orientation programs are insufficient in promoting a beneficial adjustment to the university community and its unique academic, social, and personal demands and pressures (Cole and Ivey, 1967; Foxley, 1969). True, the University of Michigan Ann-Arbor campus has an extremely low attrition rate, 5% according to Barron's Profiles of American Colleges (Barron's, 1978), but this low percentage bears closer examination. First, specific student subgroups, such as minority groups, exhibit exceedingly high attrition levels. Second, even this low overall level represents opportunity cost to the university. Davis (1962) estimates that a single student dropout represents an investment beyond that recovered by tuition to the educational institution of at least $1000. If 5% of 4000 new freshmen students leave college after their first year, attrition represents a minimum loss to the university of $200,000. Clearly, a cost-effective advising program could reduce this loss. A system of peer academic advising, with professional and faculty input and presence, offers a successful and economical means of providing academic advising to both new and continuing students. This program could limit attrition, resulting in great savings and increase student morale as well. Also, such a plan could work to increase the long-run university endowment by improving student perceptions of the university environment while in college.

William F. Brown has developed his system of student-to-student counseling over a period of almost thirty years (Brown, 1977), and this program has been instrumental in lowering Southwest Texas State's attrition levels. In fact, between academic years 1964/1965 and 1968/1969, STSU had the lowest attrition rates of all state-supported senior colleges and universities in the state of Texas. Instead of expecting students (especially marginal students) to acquire reading and learning skills on a trial-and-error basis, peer advisors can provide instruction in skills most crucial to collegiate success. Granted, the University of Michigan is a much different institution than Southwest Texas State University. Yet, the promotion of learning is one common objective. Reading and learning skills instruction offered at STSU is useful to all students, regardless of their level of academic achievement. The program developed by Dr. Brown at Southwest Texas State University has been disseminated throughout the nation through the support of the IMPACT Program of the Exxon Educational Foundation.[8/] One American institution of higher learning employing a modification of the Brown-STSU program with the aid of an IMPACT grant is Stanford University, one of the University of Michigan's peer institutions.

Brown, in a review of the literature discussing the treatment of underachievers, found that successful approaches have four common elements. First, successful programs recognize that the reasons for maladaptive behavior are not the same for all students. Therefore, a single theraputic position for all students in a treatment program is destined to fail. Second, successful programs realize that underachievers are reluctant to seek out individual help. Hence, optimal prevention or treatment of underachievement is best accomplished in the group setting. Third, if the underlying dynamics of underachievement remain unclear or unclarified, advisees will continue to

exhibit maladaptive behavior. Successful programs operate with a set of assumptions concerning the psychodynamics of underachievement. The treatment methods utilized in these programs are based upon these assumptions. Fourth, treatment methods unrelated to motivational behavior are bound to fail. Therefore, successful approaches address motivational variables in attempting to reverse patterns of underachievement.

The model student-to-student counseling program described by Brown possesses the four features common to the successful approaches to the treatment of underachievement outlined above. First, peer advisors identify and deal with each advisee's specific dynamics of underachievement. Second, this program utilizes the group setting to provide student-to-student counseling regarding effective study skills. This method reaches out and involves the advisee, assuring greater retention of the information. Third, this program is based upon a carefully devised set of psychodynamics concerning underachievement. Finally, the analysis of individual motivational variables is central to Brown's student-to-student counseling approach. Reduced cost is a significant difference between other successful approaches to improving academic achievement and the Brown-STSU program. Students can receive adequate academic adjustment counseling regardless of economic considerations because the student-to-student counseling approach requires fewer financial resources and brings more personnel to the advising system (Archer and Neubauer, 1981).

Yet, the results of Zunker and Brown (1966), Murry (1972), and Brown and Myers (1975)--that peer academic advisors are as effective, if not superior to, professional and faculty advisors--cannot be explained by saying that these "particularly well-designed advising programs" happened to utilize peers as advisors as all three tests compared peer and professional/faculty advisors within the same program. Robert Carkhuff believes

that superior paraprofessional effectiveness is due to the selection and training procedures utilized in paraprofessional counseling programs (Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus, 1966; Carkhuff, 1968; 1969).

Student-to-student counseling programs choose individuals who exhibit well-developed interpersonal skills: capacity for empathy, warmth, regard, and respect, an ability to accept people with different value systems, and high self-confidence and self-regard (Pyle and Snyder, 1971). This is in contrast to the selection processes which choose professional or faculty advisors. Their selection process begins when they first apply to graduate school. Criteria used are dominated by intellective indices: undergraduate grade-point average and scores on the Graduate Record Examination. There is no guarantee that correlation between effective interpersonal functioning and intellective indices exists.

Paraprofessional training programs are similarly specific. Such training programs are focused upon skills, competencies, and attitudes needed to foster positive advisee change. Professional training programs emphasize a mixture of "science, art, research, and practice" and this can de-emphasize natural interpersonal skills. Both screened and unscreened paraprofessionals have demonstrated the ability and capacity to learn how to promote more helpful behavior on the part of advisees after training programs as short as 20 hours (Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus, 1966; Martin and Carkhuff, 1968; Riessman, 1965). Furthermore, research by Carkhuff (1968; 1969) indicates that:

a. Paraprofessionals are more amenable to shaping their behavior toward personal growth and towards aiding advisee growth and/or change.

b. Both trainees and advisees demonstrated measurable personality growth when engaged in an action-oriented program, a program where individuals learn how to do something about their problems.

These differences in selection and training objectives and procedures could account for the findings that equal or better effectiveness and high acceptance ratings are obtained from evaluations of paraprofessional advising programs. The focus of such programs is to select and prepare people to help others, not to provide the rigorous theory component of graduate programs. Results obtained by Francine Sobey in The Nonprofessional Revolution in Mental Health (1970) show that a survey of 185 programs utilizing paraprofessionals revealed that 100 programs used paraprofessionals to perform tasks previously performed by professionals. This preference resulted from the fact that paraprofessionals can provide services in innovative ways. Furthermore, Sobey found that:

> The program directors perceived the use of paraprofessionals as contributing to improved counseling services in two unique ways: (a) filling new roles based on advisee needs previously unfilled by staff members and (b) performing tasks previously performed by professionals but adapted to the unique and special abilities of paraprofessionals. They further reported that the successful use of paraprofessionals had led to a beneficial reassessment of the role, structure, and function of counseling programs and their staffs (Brown, 1977, p. 214-15)

Student-to-student counseling programs help to reduce the "counseling strain" associated with a high student demand for advising services and the inability of the counseling system to provide adequate, cost-effective services.

However, measures must be taken in order to protect the student advisee, the peer advisor, and the advising program. Bonar (1976) suggests that: careful selection of peer advisors, comprehensive preservice and in-service training, close communication between administrators, professionals and paraprofessional advisors, and organized referral channels for problem cases, limit the danger that peer advisors will attempt to exceed their advising capabilities. Careful delineation of the peer advisor role should also limit this problem (Aschenbrenner, 1963; Robertson et al, 1976).

Each educational institution is unique. The student-to-student counseling approach outlined in Brown's Student-to-Student Counseling (1977) cannot be transplanted wholesale from one campus to another due to operational, philosophical, and environmental differences between schools. Yet, peer advisors successfully provide services in a number of student personnel functions (see footnote 1). It is evident that a properly formulated and implemented program utilizing peers can be successful in most advising venues. Hence, it is likely that certain aspects of the Brown-STSU program could be successfully combined with present services in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts resulting in a more successful, less-costly advising program.

The student-to-student counseling approach must be adapted to meet student needs and local conditions existing on a specific campus. To determine the scope of the program, a study of the educational purpose, organizational structure, learning climate, and student subculture of the institution is crucial to the development of a sound peer-based advising program. Both Brown (1977) and Bonar (1976) discuss the necessary elements and an examination of their arguments net five essential requisites for a noteworthy peer advising program:

a. formulation of meaningful peer counseling goals; the objectives of all peer advising activities should be spelled out in a manner recognizing individual and institutional needs, problems, and resources.

b. development of informed peer counseling support; the peer advising approach must be presented in a manner assuring the support and involvement of administrators, faculty, and students.

c. delineation of realistic peer counseling activities; counseling activities to be performed by peer advisors should be carefully defined. Selected procedures and materials must be appropriate to stated counseling objectives and the peer approach.

d. careful selection and training of peer counseling personnel; all personnel; professional, faculty, and student, involved in the student-to-student counseling program should be carefully selected and given appropriate training to assure their understanding of the duties and responsibilities given to peer advisors, as well as the potentialities and limitations inherent in the student-to-student counseling approach.

e. evaluation and revision of peer counseling effort; all components of the peer advising program should be systematically evaluated and individual counseling activities should be eliminated, revised, or expanded based upon their effectiveness.

Because student-to-student counseling programs are economical (Allen, 1974), acceptable to students and to faculty (Brown and Myers, 1975; Murry, 1972; Zunker, 1975), effective in improving grade-point average and study-skills efficiency (Brown, 1977; Brown, Wehe, Zunker and Haslam, 1971) and practical in terms of needed facilities and supervision (Habley, 1979), such programs are easily adaptable to other schools, provided that care is taken in designing the peer advising program.

Conclusion

Peer academic advising programs offer to the educational institution a number of positive benefits. First, these systems promote in an effective manner the social, academic, and personal adjustment of new students. Second, peer advising programs provide more services, often in innovative and successful modes, for less expense. Third, such systems enable faculty and professional time to be utilized in more productive ways. Fourth, the peer advisors are involved as counselors beyond the benefits of remuneration, bringing to the advising system an assured supply of interested counselors.

Student-to-student counseling programs have proven to be effective in a variety of student personnel service roles. Peer academic advising bears closer evaluation, and perhaps it should be employed in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts on a larger scale. It is likely that if the benefits of such a system are effectively communicated to all affected parties (faculty,

administrators, and students), a peer academic advising system could be implemented on the basis of popular demand.

Yet, if peer advising programs replace existing programs, traditional funding patterns and faculty roles will be altered. There is a strong possibility that there will be strident opposition by at least a minority of those affected by the possibility of change. It should be noted that an effective peer advising program should increase overall service utilization. This will maintain the role of existing personnel but, their advising tasks will be more specified, oriented towards their advising strengths and interests. This result was obtained from the peer financial aid advising program in the Office of Financial Aid (Borset, 1981). Institutional change can be effected through effective, persuasive arguments resting upon cost-benefit analysis.

There is one additional problem. True, paraprofessional advising is less expensive than faculty advising. Yet, funding for peer advising programs is more visible, hence, it is subject to greater scrutiny than most student service or instructional programs. In times of austerity, funding could be reduced. Reduction of resources available to academic advising services translates into reduced program effectiveness, particularly from the student viewpoint. Therefore, the implementation of student-to-student counseling programs requires high-level administrative support. Staff members responsible for the implementation of a peer advising program must be given the authority and support to effect change. The result, a more successful and cost-effective method of providing academic advising, is well worth the effort expended during the beginning stages of program development and implementation. Student-to-student academic advising appears to be a viable advising option and is an idea that warrants further

exploration among interested students, faculty and administrators in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Robertson et al (1976) p. 5, for a statement concerning the guiding principles for determining the ideal range and quality of the counseling and advising support that should be provided to students at the University of Michigan.

2. Student-to-student advising is utilized in a variety of student personnel and counseling settings. Peers have been used in: environmental assessment (May and Rademacher, 1980); financial aid counseling (Cunningham, 1981); tutoring (Fink, Grandjean, Martin, and Bertolini, 1978; Seveyega, 1978); self-help workshops (Barrow and Hetherington, 1981; Trimble, 1980); crisis intervention (McCarthy and Berman, 1971); alternative life-style counseling (Barton, 1980); in the mental health field in general (Gruver, 1971); in addition to academic advising for both mainstream and student subgroups and in orientation (Brown, 1977).

3. See "Report of the Subcommittee to Review Academic Counseling (Summary)" (1980) for a list of specific concerns with the academic counseling system in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan. These concerns, expressed by a committee of students and administrators, dovetail the student criticisms of the faculty advising system enumerated in Gnepp, Keating, and Masters (1980).

4. The ideals undergirding the reasoning behind the discussion of the student-faculty relationship (Hardee, 1959, 1970) are often and unfortunately nothing more than empty promises. At many educational institutions, faculty advising is a clerking function. In addition to frequent student criticism of faculty advising (Carney and Barak, 1976; Gnepp, Keating, and Masters, 1980) a number

of faculty and administrators at a variety of institutions have pointed out the problems associated with the traditional system of faculty advising (Dilley, 1967; Donk and Oetting, 1968; chapter six in Hardee, 1959; Moore, 1976; Polson and Jurich, 1979; Robertson, 1958; and Rossman, 1967). In view of the high levels of student dissatisfaction with faculty advising, it is obvious that in general, faculty advising falls short of meeting its objectives in any large institution. Hardee (1970) lists the following objectives of faculty advising: (a) discerning the purposes of the institution in its teaching-learning mission; (b) perceiving the purposes of the student learning; and (c) promoting these possibilities in conference with the student. These objectives are met in a number of student-faculty relationships but, a significant amount of these relationships are initiated by students with one of their current or previous instructors (Moore, 1976). Many of the objectives outlined by Hardee (1970) are met in student-faculty relationships, but these relationships exist outside of the actual academic advising system.

5. One study made at Wake Forest University by Zultowski and Catron (1976) disputes the finding that peer academic advising is as successful as it has been portrayed in the literature. Given their survey results, a number of conclusions can be drawn. They chose less favorable explanations to explain their results. For example, they discovered that more peer-advised new students sought advice from the Dean's Office than did faculty-advised freshmen. Zultowski and Catron chose to interpret this result as a failing of peer advisors to explain rules and procedures; there are other possible interpretations. This finding could easily be a function of an ability of peer advisors to break down advisee apprehension towards seeking assistance.

Perhaps peer advisors engender the attitude that "people are here to help you but you must realize when you need help and that you'll have to seek it out. Here's where to go if..." It appears that the Wake Forest program is ineffective to begin with, and the use of peer advisors will not change that fact. Brown also discusses an unsuccessful attempt to incorporate a peer advising program in the fraternity system at the University of Texas. The program was designed to promote the retention of fraternity pledges. For a number of reasons, this program was unsuccessful. Much of the ineffectiveness of the program was due to the centering of the program in fraternities, where the emphasis is on social, not academic, activities. Brown mentioned this program in order to make evident the fact that peer advising programs must be carefully designed in order to be successful.

6. Peer advisement programs also exist on the Dearborn and Flint campuses of the University of Michigan.

7. See Lattin and Layman (1981) for an explanation and evaluation of the services provided by the Students' Counseling Office in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan.

8. Studies by researchers at the University of Michigan found that it takes from twenty-five to fifty years for the widespread implementation of educational innovations. The IMPACT Program is designed to aid the spread of educational change and improvement by funding the introduction of a select number of innovative programs throughout the country. The Brown-STSU program is one of the IMPACT programs. The Exxon Education Foundation has provided grants to more than sixty institutions to foster the implementation of student-to-student counseling programs.

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